



Forum for Free Speech

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Pakistan Forum

AN INDEPENDENT MAGAZINE OF PAKISTANIS
IN U.S.A. AND CANADA

Vol. I

October – November 1970

No. 1

Forum For Free Speech

The inaugural issue of Pakistan Forum is before you. The future of this first independent Pakistani journal in Northern America is now in your hands. Our hopes for it are high; but its actual contributions to the progress of Pakistan shall depend on the extent of your support, and on your critical, creative participation in its publication.

At the very least the Forum must survive as a journal of quality, capable of providing its immediate constituents – the Pakistanis in U.S.A. and Canada – with news, analyses and perspectives on the political, social, and economic situation in our country. At its best, it should make lasting contributions towards constructing a society based on morality, justice, equality, and participation.

As an independent journal, free from the constraints of ambassadorial authority, free also of the debilitating patronage of foreign agencies like the American Friends of the Middle East, Pakistan Forum can rely only on the material and intellectual resources of its small, though critical, constituency. Its successes as well as its failings must inevitably reflect the creativity and the commitment of Pakistani students and professionals in Northern America.

Readers of Pakistan Student are familiar with the circumstances which surround the founding of the Forum. At the 1969 PSAA convention some concerned citizens discussed the civic responsibilities of educated Pakistanis (see Pakistan Student, Jan-Feb. 1970). We began with the admission that although the Pakistani "intelligentsia" generally and bitterly complained about the state of the nation and the conduct of its governments, our criticisms had been mostly superficial and self-serving. We have failed to relate the abstract principles which we espouse to our actual individual behaviour. Our commitment to progressive social ideals, and to values like justice, equality and integrity have not been operative. In order to be corrected, the contradictions between our words and deeds, and between the pronouncements and performance of our officials and leaders must be recognized, analyzed, and attacked.

Our intellectual failure may be even more serious than the moral and political ones, for ideas play a primary role in the destinies of nations. The political mind of our 'elites' is still rooted in the past. Their thinking remains stultified by slavish acceptance of colonial values and practices, by uncritical borrowing of Western ideas and institutions, and by uninspired, fundamentalist, and distorted invocations of Islam.

The task of forging new policies and institutions relevant to our contemporary conditions no less than to our religious, cultural and moral traditions has been left to feudal politicians, medieval mullahs, self-seeking soldiers, and bureaucrats trained and tested by the colonial conquerors. With few exceptions, we have failed in our primary intellectual responsibility of carrying out a meaningful debate on the opportunities for social and economic transformation, definition of national goals, and requisites for creating a just, balanced, and democratic society. Our minds and our souls, like our economic, political and social institutions, await decolonization. Our scholarly and journalistic efforts must be directed at decolonizing our society and ourselves, and at creating a new order.

Class analysis explains these failures; but not entirely. All educated Pakistanis do not belong to the landlord, capitalist, or upper bourgeois families; but they do subscribe to the ethos of the elite. The psychic integration of those of us who should have no stake in the status quo of injustice is produced by our affliction with amoral individualism and corrupting materialism.

Both attitudes, fostered by our political and economic institutions lie at the root of our malaise. They promote self-aggrandizement and obsessive pursuit of material objects which permit the educated Pakistanis to ignore the plight of the vast majority of our fellow citizens. They prevent us from thinking and acting to eradicate the inequalities and injustices upon which are predicated our ill-begotten privileges no less than the sorrows of our people. Introspection and self-examination can be painful; but we felt that our moral and political failures needed exposure; their causes deserved exploration.

We realized that by their activities alone Pakistanis abroad could not change our intellectual and political environment. We understood the limits imposed by our location in foreign lands, by our small numbers dispersed across a vast continent, and by governmental patronage of the PSAA. We also knew

that the Pakistani community in U.S.A. and Canada was a microcosm of our intelligentsia. The reactionary elements and corruptive attitudes which plague us at home are not only duplicated but often get exaggerated abroad.

We believed, however, that the unprecedented moral explosion of the masses had produced a new mood of enquiry and involvement. We wished to make a modest beginning toward a meaningful dialogue on the challenges and choices before us. Without wishing to control the PSAA, we sought to work with it. We wanted to make of it something more than an unofficial extension of the information division of our Embassy, its annual convention more than a stage for ambassadorial exhortations and variety-shows, and its journal more than a house-organ and social tabloid.

Our efforts lent a measure of seriousness to the programs of the last two conventions. We helped organize lively, scholarly discussions in several cities and campuses. Under the editorial board of 1969-70, the Pakistan Student once again began to be published regularly. Only the readers can judge the value of our modest attempt to make of Pakistan Student a relatively serious publication committed to critical and open discussion of ideas and events. The comments we received were invariably enthusiastic, and encouraged us to undertake the more difficult and challenging task of publishing the Pakistan Forum.

The events taking place at the 1970 PSAA Convention confirmed the need for a journal independent of all except the peoples' patronage. Hence, despite difficulties we have delivered the first issue to you. This is a collective effort. We invite you to join in making it a combative, critical, and innovative journal. It needs your articles, comments, suggestions. It cannot survive without your regular subscription, and additional contributions. We believe that it is a modest test of our dedication to progress in Pakistan, our ability to contribute meaningful and operative ideas to the solutions of our problems and, above all, of our capacity for independence and self-reliance.

As its name implies, it is a Forum for diverse perspectives on Pakistan. No point of view shall be excluded. Only the criterion of quality shall govern our selection of articles. Our editorials would undoubtedly carry a bias in favor of the oppressed and the exploited; and in behalf of equality, freedom, and justice. We seek to combat evils in our society no less than in ourselves. We welcome imagination and originality in the discussion of the crises confronted by our people and country.

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